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RECOVERY OF REMAINS BEGINS AT FORMER STOCKTON STATE HOSPITAL

STOCKTON – The California Department of Mental Health (DMH) today announced that archeologists have begun efforts to exhumate and relocate the century-old remains of an unknown number of patients at the former site of Stockton State Hospital.

DMH has contracted with cultural resource management firm Pacific Legacy to begin carefully exhuming the remains by hand. Heavy equipment was used to remove a protective layer of soil above the gravesite in preparation for the delicate handwork. Recovery efforts could last weeks, depending upon the number of remains recovered. All remains will be fully documented before being interred and memorialized at another cemetery.

“We have taken great care to ensure that the remains of these former patients are appropriately exhumed and transferred to a proper location, where they will be respectfully re-interred,” said DMH Director Dr. Stephen Mayberg.

The remains, which the San Joaquin County coroner has estimated to be from the late 1800s, were buried in what was once a graveyard on the grounds of the former Stockton State Hospital. They were buried in coffins in orderly rows, but when the hospital closed in 1996 there were no existing grave markers or records to determine the identities of the people laid to rest there.

The old cemetery site was discovered in December 2005 during the course of developing land for the City of Stockton’s new University Park. Construction was immediately halted and all former owners of the site, including DMH, the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and California State University (CSU), were contacted.

Representatives from all three agencies immediately began working with Stockton city officials and mental health advocacy groups to determine the best and most respectful course of action. Recovery efforts have begun now that weather conditions have allowed the ground to sufficiently dry.

DMH, DDS and CSU will equally share the estimated \$225,000 cost of exhumation and relocation. Memorials will be established both at University Park and at the relocation cemetery and will be dedicated to the men and women who died and were buried at the former Stockton State Hospital.